

Story 1095 (1972 Tape 9)

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### The Emergence of Battal Gazi<sup>1</sup>

I shall tell you a story about Battal Gazi. His name was Cafer. After he became famous, people renamed him Battal; they called him that because he was a brave robust man, and battal means heavy.<sup>2</sup> In past times, people called Ankara Mahmure or Mamure.<sup>3</sup>

This story begins in Malatya, where a man named Numan

<sup>1</sup> A legendary Moslem hero of the Faith, he is featured in many printed and oral stories. His exploits may be based in small part on the activities of Abd Allah al-Battal, a Moslem warrior who died in the year 740 (122 H.)-- see Encyclopedia of Islam.

The term gazi refers to one who fights on behalf of Islam. It follows the name of the person it honors. In the earliest days of Islam there were many men designated as gazi, for at that time Islam was a small religion fighting for survival in a strongly pagan context.

<sup>2</sup> Battal actually means large, clumsy (Arabic: strong).

<sup>3</sup> From very ancient times the place has been called Ankara or Angora. Is Mahmure a tribal dialect name for the city, or is the narrator inventing supposedly ancient terms as he goes along? He seems to have a fondness for throwing in linguistic observations.

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was vali.<sup>4</sup> The commander of Numan's border guard<sup>5</sup> was a man named Hüseyin Gazi, who had been working for Numan in this capacity for a long time. /This Hüseyin Gazi was the father of Battal Gazi./ This Hüseyin Gazi was a very brave man.

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One day Hüseyin Gazi went hunting (they would have said then he went şikar<sup>6</sup>) in the territory protected by the commander of the Byzantine border guard, a man named Mihriyar. This Mihriyar had come originally from a place near Ankara. While Hüseyin Gazi was hunting, he saw a deer, and he said to himself, "Let me capture that deer and give it to Cafer as a present." (At that time Cafer--we now call him Battal--was still a child. Hüseyin began following the deer. The deer ran, and Hüseyin Gazi ran after it. This was a pet deer which belonged to Mihriyar, but Hüseyin Gazi did not know that. When the deer finally reached Mihriyar's tent, totally exhausted, Mihriyar asked, "Who could have done this to my deer?" He then ordered his attendants, "Find out who did

<sup>4</sup> A vali is the governor of a province. Shortly after the death of the Prophet there was a governor of Kufa named Numan. Numan here seems to be name-dropping.

<sup>5</sup> The narrator uses here and subsequently the term salasker. Asker means soldier, but salasker is not listed among the words in the large Redhouse Dictionary. From the context here we are assuming that a salasker is a military leader and that he commands forces that serve as border guards rather than regular army troops.

<sup>6</sup> In modern Turkish şikar means game or prey

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this!"

Hüseyin Gazi had gone hunting without taking his çihal with him. (It is said that a çihal was a special kind of rope used in warfare in those days.<sup>7</sup> As a result, Mihriyar's soldiers caught Hüseyin Gazi. But he was very brave, and he was not at all afraid of the soldiers. He said to them, Have them send to me that deer I chased here. I want to take it to my son, Cafer."

When Mihriyar heard him say this, he said, "So he is the one who chased my deer until it was completely exhausted. Now we have an opportunity to kill him." Placing Hüseyin upon his horse, they challenged him to fight. He fought bravely, but, greatly outnumbered, he was finally killed at the top of a hill. But they were unable to capture his horse. That great horse eventually went to Malatya. (Ancient horses were wonderful creatures.

Before he went to Malatya, the horse stopped at a village that is attached to our town of Alaca, a village called Goru. The tomb of Hüseyin Gazi is there. Everyone around here knows that place. It is a kind of landmark. People give

<sup>7</sup> This is not clear. How would a short rope (the meaning of çihal) have prevented his defeat or capture? Possibly the rope was a talisman, an amulet, or some kind of life token that protected Hüseyin.

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travelers directions by saying, "Go to the right at Goru," or "Go to the left at Goru." When the horse arrived there all covered with blood and riderless, everyone realized that Hüseyin had been killed.

At that time Hüseyin's son, Cafer, was only seven or eight years old. He was much too young to succeed to his father's position, and so another person was appointed to fill that post temporarily. The man was a wrestler named Abdüsselam, and he became the new commander of the border guard.

Word about Hüseyin's death had been sent to the Caliph, who at that time lived at Baghdad. The Caliph sent a warning to Abdüsselam: "Stay on guard against the Byzantines. If they learn that Hüseyin Gazi has been killed, they may be encouraged to make an attack upon us."

Year after year passed until he was fifteen or eighteen years old. At that point several of Hüseyin's closest friends, led by a man named Tevadi Rum,<sup>8</sup> came to the assistance of Cafer. They said, "Cafer has now grown sufficiently to assume the role of commander of the border guard which his father had held." They presented this idea to Abdüsselam

<sup>8</sup> The word Rum in this man's name suggests strongly that he was Greek or had lived in Greek territory. While Rum ultimately refers to Rome or Roman, the Roman Empire with which the Turks first made contact was the Eastern Roman Empire made up largely of Greeks.

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Abdüsselam responded, "His father's blood has not yet dried. First he should go and avenge his father's murder. Once having done that, he will deserve to apply for the position of border commander to succeed his father."

Cafer went home at midnight (which we call mısrı leyli<sup>9</sup>) and asked his mother, "Where was my father killed? And how was he killed, my mother?" His mother was very reluctant to tell him that, because she feared that as soon as he knew these things, he would take his revenge<sup>41-48, 44-</sup> against his father's enemies. She wanted to wait until a later time to give him the information he had requested. Impatient at this, Cafer set out to find and punish those who had killed his father.

Cafer arose, mounted his father's horse, and set out upon a long journey. In earlier times Hüseyin Gazi had lived among the Byzantines, and he had known a number of their priests. There lived also in the area where Cafer was traveling an old friend of Hüseyin named Şammas Pir. On the night after Cafer had set out on his journey, this Şammas Pir had a dream in which he heard Hüseyin Gazi speaking to him: "My son is setting forth to kill Mihriyar in order to avenge my death. Advise him how to go about this undertaking."

<sup>9</sup> This is not standard modern Turkish. Is it Arabic? Kurdish?

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Arising early the following morning, Şammas Pir went up to the roof of his house. While he was studying the horizon, he saw that in the distance a rider was approaching. As the rider was passing before his house, Şammas Pir called to him, saying, "Welcome, Cafer! You are my guest here for two or three days!" Cafer was surprised to receive such a greeting from this stranger who was dressed like a Byzantine. Şammas Pir then said, "Don't worry about anything. I was a very close friend of your father. Come in!"

Right after he entered the house, Cafer saw a Koran in which some words had been inscribed in his father's handwriting. Taken up the Koran, Cafer read from it a prayer in behalf of his father's soul

Şammas Pir then said to him, "What you have set out to do is very difficult. Change your mind and give up this quest to avenge your father's death."

But Cafer refused to take this advice. He said, "No, it is impossible for me to give up this quest. I must avenge the death of my father!" Then Şammas Pir gave him some directions about how he was to proceed. After listening carefully to all that Şammas Pir said, Cafer set out again upon his journey.

On his way to Ankara, Cafer accidentally encountered along

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the road not Mihriyar but his brother, Mihraset. This Mihraset was also a very brave man. After they had exchanged greetings and had begun to talk with each other, Cafer said, "I have just come from Chinese territory, and I am seeking an experienced warrior who can give me instructions in the arts of war. I want to become a warrior myself, and I have heard that in this area there live many accomplished warriors. Do you know any such person whom you can recommend to me?"

Mihraset answered, "You are a very fortunate man! You have just, by mere chance, encountered such a person. I am Mihriyar's brother, and my name is Mihraset. I have taught the arts of warfare to two or three hundred men, and all of them are now famous fighters.<sup>10</sup> Let me instruct you also, and you may well become more famous than any of them has so far become.

After Cafer had heard Mihraset say that he was the brother of Mihriyar, he changed his mind about his procedure, but he gave no indication of his changed attitude. He simply said, "All right, let us see if you can train me to be a good warrior. Let us have a mock encounter right now so that can begin your military instruction at once." This they did,

<sup>10</sup> Here and several other times the narrator describes a fighter as a wrestler.

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and after a few exchanges Cafer knocked Mihraset to the ground. This occurred because Cafer was much stronger than Mihraset, though not all of the power that he wielded was his own. Special power had been transferred to him on this occasion from our Prophet, Mohammed.

Dismounting quickly, Cafer jumped upon Mihraset and sat astride his chest. Grappling his enemy by the throat, Cafer said, "I am the son of Hüseyin Gazi. If you will become a Moslem, I shall release you, for you are not especially important to me." But Mihraset would not accept Islam, and in the end Cafer beheaded him. Burying Mihraset's head there, Cafer continued on his journey.

Shortly after that he came to Gayaş, a famous garden which belonged to Mihriyar. Mihriyar came there whenever he needed rest and relaxation. When Cafer arrived at this garden, he turned his horse loose to graze, and he himself entered the kiosk<sup>11</sup> to sleep. He was very tired, for by now he had not slept for several days.

As it happened, on that same day Mihriyar decided to come to that garden with fourteen of his companions for some rest and entertainment. When the group arrived there, they saw

<sup>11</sup> A kiosk is a summer house or garden house. Although some are quite large, kiosks are usually of light structure; they are open and airy, with high ceilings and many large windows. They ordinarily belong only to rich people, and they are very seldom the owner's primary residence.



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that a horse had been allowed to be untethered and was roaming about the garden, kicking up soil and eating the plants there. Going to the kiosk, they found there a young man asleep. While men were talking among themselves about just who this young might be, Cafer awoke and was startled to see others there.

The men laughed at his surprise, and then they asked him several questions: "Who are you? What are you doing here? Where have you come from? Why did you come here? Why did you turn your horse loose in such a garden?"

Mihriyar then said to him, "Your horse has beaten down and damaged much of this garden. Didn't you know that this garden was mine?"

Cafer responded, "No, I didn't know that. I have come from the territory of China. I came here in search of a good warrior from whom I could take some instruction in the arts of war. I did not know whose garden this is."

Mihriyar said, "Well, it seems that you are a very lucky young man. I am the Greek Caesar's border commander and also his uncle. I killed Hüseyin Gazi right here in this garden a few years ago." Of course, Mihriyar had no way of knowing that he was speaking to the son of Hüseyin Gazi. Mihriyar kept saying, "Let me train you to become a famous warrior, a

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warrior of unequalled ability."

The group of men with Mihriyar now began to prepare dinner. They cooked a large quantity of lamb kebab.<sup>12</sup> As men began to eat this food, Mihriyar and his friends consumed a great amount of wine. They said to Cafer, "Come Drink some wine with us as you eat your dinner!"

Cafer did not want to drink any wine because he was a faithful Moslem. However, he said, "I took a vow not to drink anything alcoholic until I had returned to my own country. But I shall be glad to serve the wine to you.

They accepted this offer, and Cafer began to fill and refill their glasses. It was not long before Mihriyar and fourteen friends were all quite drunk. In this condition, Mihriyar said to Cafer, "Let us go outside the kiosk into the garden." The two of them went outside and began to walk about in the large garden. Knowing that all of the commander's friends were drunk, Cafer struck Mihriyar a hard blow that knocked him to the ground. Cafer then grabbed him by the throat and said to Mihriyar, "If you will become a Moslem, I shall free you. I am the son of Hüseyin Gazi. If you refuse

<sup>12</sup> Kebab is made mainly of small pieces of meat roasted upon a skewer. The meat may be either lamb or beef, but in Turkey it is usually lamb. Interspersed with the pieces of meat on the skewer are chunks of various vegetables--onion, pepper, and tomato.

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to become a Moslem, I shall cut your throat." It was not possible for Mihriyar to accept Islam, and so Cafer beheaded him and placed his head in a prominent place on the ground.

Cafer then returned to the kiosk and said to one of the men there, "Mihriyar wants to see you outside." Taking this man into the garden, Cafer cut off his head too. This he did again and again until he had beheaded thirteen of companions of Mihriyar. The only one still alive was a man named Eflun. Taking Eflun into the garden, Cafer pointed to the heap of human heads there and said, "Look at these dead bodies and these heads. If you will agree to become a Moslem, I shall not cut off your head, and then you will go with me as my companion. But if you refuse to accept Islam, then I shall behead you too." Eflun decided to become a Moslem.

Cafer and Eflun remained at the kiosk that night. In the morning they gathered up the head of Mihriyar and the heads of his thirteen dead companions and put them into a large bag. They then mounted their horses and began the long trip to Malatya. They stopped briefly at the place where Mihraset's head was buried and added his head to those already in the bag. Proceeding farther, they arrived at the home of Şammas Pir. Şammas Pir was amazed and almost stunned to see them and to hear their story. All he could say at first was

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"Bravo! Bravo!" Then he said some time later, "You had an impossible task to undertake! No one could have carried out that task. You must have been extremely lucky." They spent two or three days there as the guests of Şammas Pir, and then they continued on to Malatya

After his arrival at Malatya, Cafer made a complete report of all that had happened on his trip to the Bey of Malatya, a man named Emir Ömer.<sup>13</sup> Emir Ömer, in turn, sent all of this information to the Caliph.

The Caliph at that time had a carrier pigeon which he used to send his orders to the various places within the caliphate (People in those days did not have telephones, and in order to send important messages, they often used carrier pigeons. So the Caliph sent a message to Malatya in which he said, "Give to Cafer the position formerly held by his father. Having avenged very effectively the death of his father, Cafer deserves to have his father's old post."

<sup>13</sup> The narrator does not explain why Cafer made his report to Emir Ömer instead of to the vali of Malatya, said earlier to be named Numan. The Turkish word bey has different connotations, according to when and where it appears. In the 10th-century Book of Dede Korkut, it clearly referred to an aristocrat, hence equivalent to lord. In more recent times it could refer to any man of landed gentry, equivalent to the Scottish laird. In modern times it is used as an honorific following a man's name, in which case it refers neither to social status nor to land possession.

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While all of this was going on, what was happening at the court of the Greek Caesar? When the Greek Caesar, who lived at Istanbul, heard how Cafer had killed Mihriyar and thereby avenged the murder of his father, he began considering what to do. He thought to himself, "Hüseyin Gazi's son is only seventeen or eighteen years old now, and yet he has done so much damage to us already. He went to Ankara and there he killed my uncle and border commander. If he grows still more and becomes even stronger, there is no telling what he may do next. Let us take action against him now before he gains any more power

At that time the Greek Caesar had four sons. The youngest was named Rabia, and the oldest was Semun. The second son was called Şammas, and the third was Gostantı. The youngest arose and said to his father, "Give me 100,000 soldiers and the two warriors named İpriyanus and Kipriyanus. The person who killed my uncle is a young man. I am a young man too. Therefore let me be the one to go and take revenge against him.

His father agreed with Rabia's thinking about this matter, and he issued orders that Rabia be provided with the number of troops he requested plus the two famous warriors İpriyanus and Kipryanus. As soon as he had thus received his father's

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consent to take vengeance against Cafer, Rabia wrote a letter to the Bey of Malatya. In this letter he said, "Capture son of Hüseyin Gazi and send him to me. If you fail to do this, I shall march to Malatya and destroy the city so completely that not one stone will remain on top of another stone

When news of this threat reached Abdüsselam, who had become the interim border commander after Hüseyin Gazi's death, he was alarmed, and he blamed the impending trouble on Cafer. "Did he ask for anyone's opinion about his expedition of vengeance? Did he inform us about it? Did any of us even know what his intentions were? Now we will see what will happen! He will learn what results from stepping on the tail of a sleeping snake!"

When Cafer heard about these remarks, he said to Abdüsselam, "Don't worry about this at all! I shall go and I shall answer their challenge!"

People said that Cafer--some at that time called him Seyid-i Cafer--had a horse that was a legacy from Hamza.<sup>14</sup> They spoke also of an unusual sword which he had inherited

<sup>14</sup> Which Hamza is referred to here is not indicated. It may well be that Hamza who was a contemporary of the Prophet. Known as "The Lion of God and His Prophet," that Hamza was a great warrior for the cause of early Islam.

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from his father, Hüseyin Gazi. That sword varied in weight. Sometimes it was very heavy, and at other times it was quite light. It might weigh 10 batman<sup>15</sup> or just 2 batman, but on the other hand, it might weigh as much as 50 batman. But of course people exaggerate when they talk about such things. The name of this sword was Tini Sekkar.<sup>16</sup> He also had a great mace named Samsivar. Thus he was well equipped for a difficult war

When Cafer left his home at midnight, his mother, Zahide, wept, but nothing was changed by that. Cafer went first to the home of his father's old friend Şammas Pir, to whom he explained the entire problem. Şammas said to Cafer, "Cafer, there are two mighty men among your enemies. They are the two most famous warriors in the world. Besides these two mighty warriors, there is a force of 100,000 soldiers. What can you do against such odds? You are only one man.

"What can I do?" repeated Cafer. "No matter what happens, I must go!" While it was true that he was only one man,

<sup>15</sup> The term batman must always be defined. In recent times it has varied in weight from 2.5 to 10 kilograms. Many people in Turkey tag it as being 8 kilos, but at times in history it has weighed much more than that, its peak weight being 300 pounds (in Bukhara).

<sup>16</sup> Inasmuch as this name has two words, it may well have some literal meaning instead of being just a sound. If so, we do not know that meaning.

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Cafer was a very special person. It is said that he lived for 360 years.

There once was a man named Abdülvahib Gazi. When he was about 30 years old, he went to the land where the Greeks live. *in here* Our Prophet had been talking to his congregation almost every night about this land. He had told them about a revelation which he had had concerning it. One day, however, he preferred not to talk to the congregation, and he said, "One of you, stand up and speak to the congregation. Let us hear the message that you bring to us today!"

Abdülvahib stood up and said, "Ya, Mohammed! I once went to the land of Rome.<sup>17</sup> There I saw villages built close to each other and I saw cities also built close to each other. They had plenty of water there, and the weather was beautiful. But the people of Rome are not Moslems. There is not a Moslem among them." Mohammed felt that there should be some Moslems in that land, and one day God sent Mohammed a message via Gabriel in which God ordered that Mohammed see to it that there be some Moslems in that land. "You will cause people in that land to accept Islam," God ordered.

<sup>17</sup> The narrator says Rum. Literally this means Rome. Inasmuch as the seat of power of the Roman Empire had moved to Constantinople by the time that Islam was born, Rum (Rome) really refers to the Byzantine world, which was more Greek than Roman.



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God again sent a message to Mohammed via Gabriel: "You will be sent a person who will cause Islam to be accepted by many of the people of Rome." Mohammed reported this also to his congregation.

Again Abdülvahib arose. This time he asked, "O Mohammed, how will we be able to recognize this person?"

Once again God sent a message to Mohammed, "Go and your people that the person who will come to your assistance will be very tall; he will have rather dark skin; and he will have a very unusual mark on his face."

Mohammed announced these physical traits of the man who would appear as the champion of Islam. Turning then to Abdülvahib, he said, "Now you have three signs by which to recognize this man. When you do positively identify him, give him these gifts: this magic armband,<sup>18</sup> this set of prayer beads, and this robe. But do not give these away until you are absolutely certain that you have found the right man."

While this was going on, Cafer and Şammas were sitting and talking at the grave of Hüseyin Gazi. As they sat there, the forces of the Greek Caesar were approaching that place on their way to Malatya. Rabia exhorted his troops to keep

<sup>18</sup> The narrator here uses the word pazıbant. This mean simply an armband, but it may also mean an amulet, talisman, or magic armband.

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marching: "Come on! We have a time scheduled for our arrival at Malatya." They still had about forty hours of traveling to reach their destination.

Cafer and Şammas soon heard a loud sound approaching the place where they were sitting, and then in the distance the Byzantine army came into view. Cafer said to Şammas, "Watch now and see what I shall do! I shall meet them at the top of that small hill yonder which has several graves on it, and there I shall show you how a warrior behaves." Şammas, however, was doubtful about this, for he knew the size of the Byzantine army, and he knew about the two mighty warriors whose aid Rabia had enlisted.

Cafer mounted his horse and rode to the top of the small hill he had indicated. When Rabia saw a single man trying to block the progress of his army, he ordered one of his soldiers, "Go and behead that fellow and bring his head to me! What kind of behavior is this?"

Riding out to behead Cafer, the soldier shouted at him "What kind of man are you? Here is a mighty host of troops. Aren't you at all afraid of them?"

Cafer answered, "I am the man whom you are all seeking. I am Cafer." Saying this, he killed the soldier.

Observing this from a distance, Rabia said to İpriyanus,

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"Go and kill that fellow! Cut off his head and bring it to me!"

İpriyanus mounted his horse immediately and rode to hill. He said to Cafer, "Are you stupid? You act like a child Who are you, anyway?"

"I am the man whom you are all seeking. I am Hüseyin Gazi's son. I came here because I thought it would tire you too much to travel all the way to Malatya."

İpriyanus said, "If I attack you first, you would be killed at once, and so there would be no battle at all. Let us have you attack me first."<sup>19</sup>

But Cafer refused this advantage, saying, "No, you attack me first."

İpriyanus therefore began to attack Cafer. When İpriyanus attempted to strike Cafer with his sword, Cafer caught his wrist and forced him to drop his weapon. Twice more İpriyanus attacked, but he did no harm to Cafer.

Cafer then said, "İpriyanus, you have attacked me three times. I now have the right to attack you three times but I shall attack only once. I dedicate one of my turns to God and one to Mohammed. The third turn I shall take to

<sup>19</sup> In such duels and in jousting games such as cirit, the contestants take turns at offense and defense. This is different from Western jousting, in which both sides take the offensive.

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attack you. Be on guard!" By now İpriyanus realized that Cafer was certainly not a child. Riding the horse descended from the steed of Hamza and swinging the mighty sword left to him by his father, Cafer struck İpriyanus such a powerful blow that he split his enemy's body into two parts

Some time prior to this, back in Malatya Cafer's friends were deeply worried about the task that he had undertaken. They said among themselves, "He is up there alone. How can he carry on the war alone? Let us raise an army of 5,000 or 6,000 troops--even 10,000, if that is possible--and go to assistance." By the time he was engaging İpriyanus in battle, these troops had begun to arrive. From the corner of one he observed their approach, and this increased his courage even more.

After the death of İpriyanus, Kipriyanus rode forth to attack Cafer, but he too was killed. Then the two armies met, and large-scale warfare began. During the battle Cafer captured Rabia, the son of the Greek Caesar. Without their leader, the Byzantine forces found themselves in a difficult situation, and they soon surrendered. Rabia and all of his troops accepted Islam, and so there would now be many Moslems in the land of Rome.

At that point Abdülvahib rode up to Cafer. Speaking to

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all those near Cafer, he said, "You are all my witnesses I am giving Cafer these three gifts sent by Mohammed, for Cafer is the man with the three traits which God had described to Mohammed." Also conferred upon Cafer by Mohammed was his own magical insight <sup>20</sup>

As a result of this special insight, Cafer acquired great knowledge. He could, for example, speak seventy-two different languages, and he knew thoroughly twelve major areas of learning. Even though he was not an educated person in the usual sense of that expression, he knew as much as any wise man by means of the special insight he received from Mohammed.

Cafer and his friends returned to Malatya, and that is the place where this story ends.

<sup>20</sup> The narrator calls this magical insight tükmük.